

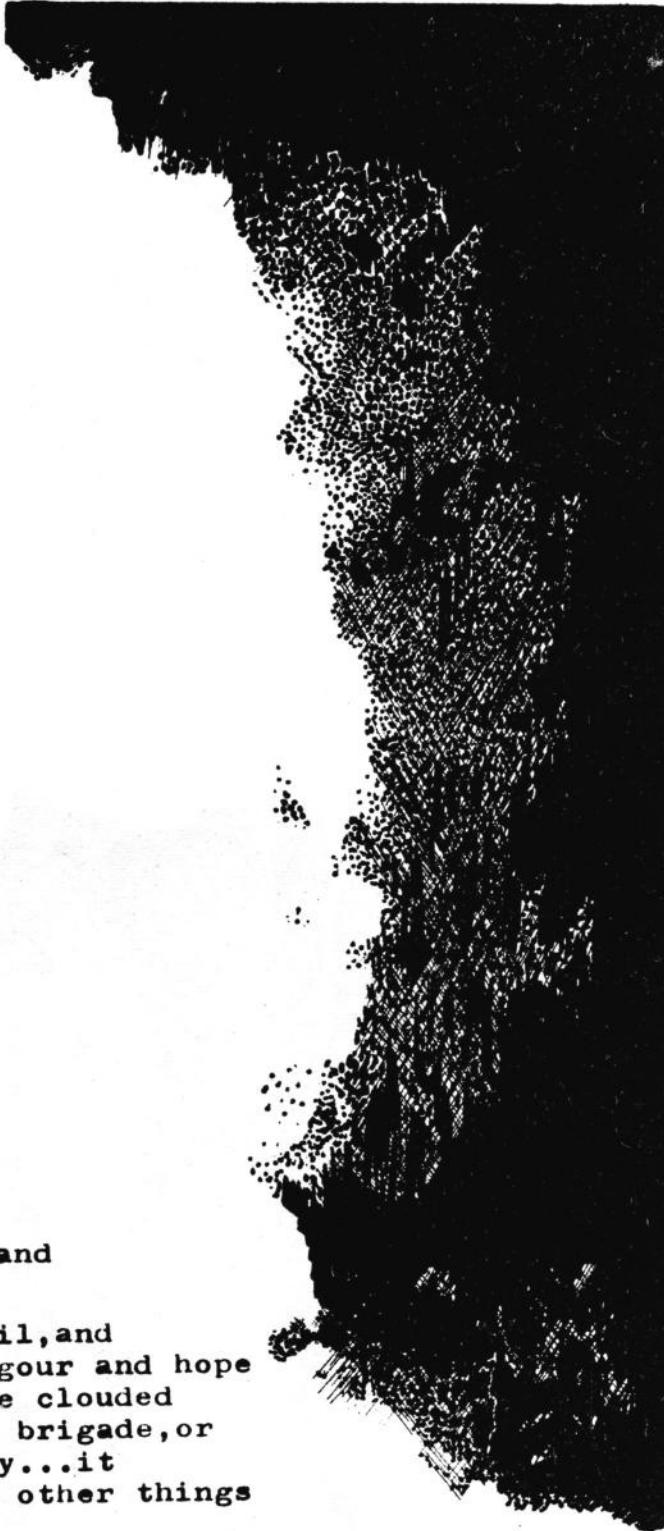


DANGEROUS LOGIC

CLASH

4 POP GROUP 7 STIFF 11

THIS HEAT 17 MFS 20



a grey journal
grey as in soft and
hard...
and run on turmoil, and
with a bit of vigour and hope
not wishing to be clouded
into the fanzine brigade, or
the xerox cavalry...it
wants to look at other things
differently



The CLASH

MEDIA-GAMERY AND THE POLITICS OF FLASH

'This is the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by imperceptible although palpable things' which reaches its absolute fulfilment in the spectacle, where the world sense is invaded and permeated by a selection of images which at the same time have forced their acknowledgement as the tangible par excellence'.

'Then... but... what are you doing here? I mean why do you like The Clash Clash?'

'Because they make me jump up and down.' And she pogoed away.

A little past Camden Lock, and its dirty canal, are the old railway sheds. Once goods centres they remain dark and grimy, leased out to coal merchants and antique dealers. Amongst them is Rehearsal Rehearsals.

This is where Bernie Rhodes first put The Clash together, rehearsing until they were ready to gig, where they debuted for the press, and probably where Joe Strummer stencilled 'Passion is a Fashion' across some of his battle fatigues.

Strummer may or may not still have the same piece of clothing, but in a way that statement pinpoints the contradictions and enigmatic qualities which now nearing two years later, The Clash have attained.

For doubtless The Clash are an enigma, and at that they are a political enigma flirting with music, rather than vice-versa. And if anything this enigma has been a media creation. Where a year ago The Clash were being lauded for their fusion of music to the politics of everyday life, today they are falling foul—at least with the very same media—for not living up to the ideals they first expounded. The key to the mystery lies in the conflict between their manager Bernie Rhodes' manipulative manoeuvring with the Press, with the Press's own vision of what The Clash represented.

Despite and because of all of this, since 1976, and especially since the final anarchic pyre and dissolution of The Sex Pistols, The Clash—always the former's alter-ego—remain the only first-wave Punk band not to have undergone substantial member changes, and to some the most 'vital' group today, but also one that has transcended trend, and has become just as much a particular representative of mass appeal as say Abba are.

It is a strange but probably true thing, that if those two years ago, one had dared to suggest that The Clash and their trailblazing apparel would catch on, one would have been scornfully ridiculed, at least in most circles.

Bernie Rhodes, before he took on managing The Clash, was Malcolm McLaren's assistant; the two moulding the earliest of the Sex Pistols formations into viable posthumous legends: McLaren's past is well documented—art school student for many years; radical politics, situationism—Paris 1968; the brief but disastrous flurry of managing The New York Dolls; and of course the various manifestations of his King's Road 'Seditionaries' shop. Rhodes though has drawn a discreet veil over his former associations and involvements, even if the two were together in Paris in '68. Yet at a distance, what McLaren attempted with the Dolls, when in 1973 he tried, and failed, to reactivate The Dolls with a far left communist stance, looks in perspective very much like a prototype of The Clash, or at least what Rhodes envisaged conceptually The Clash as.

Rhodes first met Mick Jones and Paul Simonon in September '75. Mick Jones, then was the kind who lives on the most grandiose fantasy rock'n'roll provides, fascinated, probably obsessed, by the aura surrounding groups such as the Stones, Mott The Hoople, and Iggy Pop, to the extent he'd be found in early 1976 at Patti Smith or Ramones gigs, earnestly imitating Keith Richards sartorial dress. Accompanying him on these occasions would be Paul Simonon,

already garnished with a dull red spike-top, with the haunting good looks of David Bowie or for that matter James Dean, and probably thus being often mistaken for Johnny Rotten. Both were at Art School (the traditional wood-work from whence the most radical of British musicians have consistently emerged), Simonon learning bass, and by the spring they had met Joe Strummer, formed a group together. With his joining came a conscious identity and direction to be embraced, something that was lacking previously when only Mick and Paul had been trying to put a group, London SS, together (a name they're probably overtly embarrassed about). Amidst the dabbling in and borrowing from, their Art School days, Bernie's push and advice, Mott, and of course The Dolls, and the anomalous politics The Clash, Paul Simonon's name, were born.

Their first gig, well entwined in lore, was a showpiece for the press; a strange twist, considering how many bands wait years in vain for any kind of mention in black and white. But with both Caroline Coon and John Ingham waiting in the wings, both excitedly watching the Punk animal emerge, The Clash's future, at least in type space, was assured. So within less than a handful of gigs The Clash had caught the more cognisant writers in an unremitting grasp, and just like cognisanti are prone to do, they babbled on about the group, about their burning intensity, of that curious and twisted contention—the group's politics. Par example.

"For instance on 'White Riot'. The song played with the force of an acetylene torch, is no less politically uncompromising than the other numbers in the band's repertoire. Numbers like 'Denight', 'Protex Blues', 'Career Opportunities' and '1977'."

The rest:—extremely selective gigs; 100 Club Punk Festival, I.C.A. The Pistols Anarchy tour; the Roxy Club opening night; chosen both for maximu

opening night; chosen both for maximum publicity and to give the scene a hard-edged definition (much helped, and oft-quoted by the authorities' oppressive measures) ensured when the time came, the public would be double queueing, if only for the sake of compulsive curiosity, or more likely, trend—is as they say history.

The first time I saw The Clash, their fifth or sixth gig, however roguishly brusque the music, and however tinnily insufficient the P.A., there was still that unnerving sensation—that heady buzz, that one was witnessing rock'n'roll at its purist, at its whitest.

The music itself was . . . er . . . emaciated, its bones and body under-nourished, and easily visible. Not in itself surprising for such an early gig. They moved like demons though, pumping adrenalin, bodies ablaze with action. What the music lacked was easily compensated for by their unharvested abandon.

But it was the appearance which really caught and curled you. Weird bright red drainpipes; Oxfam shirts and boilersuits daubed coherently with day-glo slogans; splattered paint; tacky cellophane ties, and of course the obligatory cropped angry hair. Here blurring your eyes with vitality, and speed of change was, to adapt a leaf out of George Melly's eloquent book, for a moment, revolt into fashion, or perhaps fashion out of revolt.

A lot, of course, has changed since then. Two sell-out nationwide tours, and last December, perhaps in recognition of their mercurial rise, The Clash play three nights at the London Rainbow with its attendant, inevitable pandemonium. It is an event, a celebration and no longer a sedition. It is also irrefutable proof that they, along with their erstwhile bloodbrothers, The Pistols, far and ahead the most popular and successful of the original Punk bands.

For over the year the press has elevated them to a massive superhero status, and The Clash have moved on to the rock media's sacred podium, which for years has been reserved exclusively for The Rolling Stones.

That podium:

Stones: rock medias, a/the perfect mythic sixties band. That blurred amorphous revolutionary impact, won by default, out of stance rather than stand; via attitude more than action. Great clothes, political yet flash—for the impressionable, for a generation, and/or plus, plus those bonus side issues—manifestations of drugs, death, Altamont, and so on.

In the sixties and into the seventies, the greasy, gypsy flash, had for those in control of youth culture's vessels far more political importance and immediate relevance, than any other form of passionate radicalism—from CND to the Situationists.

Here personified in the Stones was an accessible radicalism, one which could justify the easy fragmentary politics of idolatry, central to so much of youth

THE CLASH, one of the most overtly



culture, especially amongst the various élans, ones which argued vaguely along the lines that in supporting, digging a subversive force readily digested, by the media, and through it, for anyone who desired the hipness of transparent politics.

And into the seventies, as the Stones became, rather than tampered with, the grandiose, the argument elaborated so that aristocratic seditiousness continued to give a (if strained) political credibility and social role, to a clinically dead group.

That was until The Sex Pistols and The Clash arrived. For with unnerving ease both bands have taken over requisite aspects of the media's obsessional coverage of the Stones.

Yet if only one of the two was to have survived, then because of The Pistols' overt media and business manipulation, and the niggling doubts this induced, also because of the Clash's apparently pure commitment, it would have obviously been the latter of the two groups.

Events have overtaken such possibilities. It was the conflict between what the rock media saw and inevitably made The Sex Pistols—a spectacular subversion; and McLaran's own vision—the subversion of the spectacular; that caused the group to fold. So far The Clash have similarly fitted these myths perfectly—young, haunted, intense, naive, vague, vogue, flash, undulating, political and enigmatic. Their rise has run on an explicit political ticket, although the beautiful foginess of what their particular brand of 'politics' actually came down to has both helped and hindered them—

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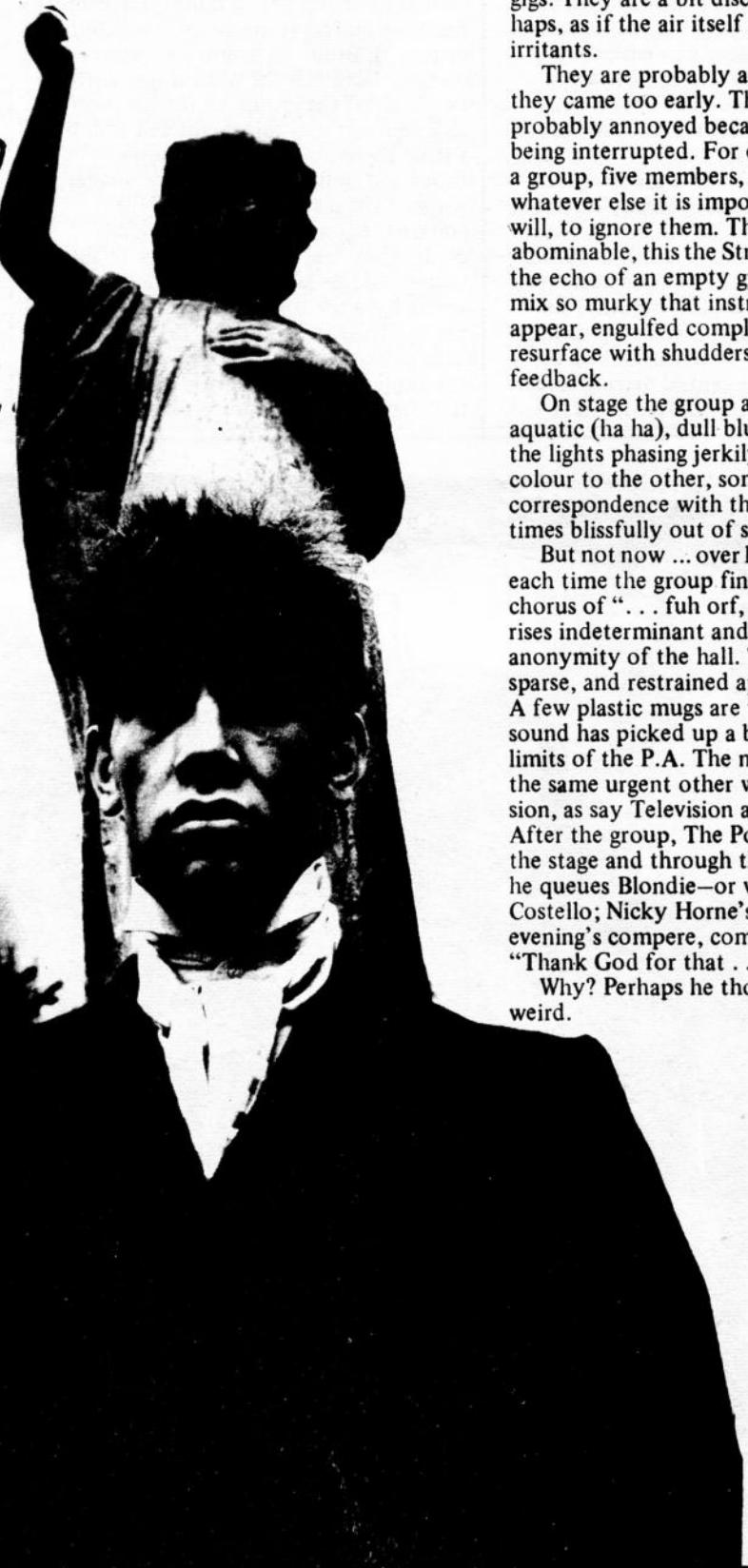
"The Clash wear Red Guard armbands and encourage white kids to start a riot of their own instead of turning on the niggers who actually have the guts to stand up for their own rights."

"Finally we move to the political patch. It seems to me the band are down-playing a political image they acquired six months ago. Joe won't accept it. The Clash never had a political image, he asserts."

The commitment, their politics has had its effects—but in one dimension—rock'n'roll. They've subsidised various bands, exposing them, and the scene at the same time. Also, along with Johnny Rotten they've helped cut down the barriers between reggae and the Punk audience, although the lasting implications of this have yet to be seen. Already though, they are at the head of a new rock élite. It's very difficult to resolve the contradictions—that of wanting to be a rock-star, in the traditional sense—untouchable, celluloid; and remaining personally in touch with one's fans. Today if you follow the London scene you can end up sharing barspace and light chat at a gig with a band-member, but friends and followers quickly change into a cocooning, protective entourage. And Punk (and its residue) has probably divided itself hierarchically quicker than any other

THE POP GROUP

... WAITING TO
INTRODUCE
YOU TO
YOUR MIND...



The audience are very unpunk. There are a few spiketops and even less leather. Most people are wearing badges of various denominations (legitimised grafitti?), a lot of them bear the legends 'I like Otway', or 'Let's make this the big one for Otway'. This of course, is a John 'really free' Otway concert. One has come for a good loon, get pissed, etc.

At this moment it's a bit early for that though. People stand around, drink, dance a bit, and wait, just like at most gigs. They are a bit disconcerted perhaps, as if the air itself is rife with irritants.

They are probably annoyed because they came too early. They are also probably annoyed because they are being interrupted. For on stage there is a group, five members, one taller, and whatever else it is impossible, try as one will, to ignore them. The sound is abominable, this the Strand Lyceum, has the echo of an empty gym hall, and a mix so murky that instruments disappear, engulfed completely, only to resurface with shudders of unwanted feedback.

On stage the group are bathed in aquatic (ha ha), dull blues and greens, the lights phasing jerkily from one colour to the other, sometimes in correspondence with the music, sometimes blissfully out of synch.

But not now ... over halfway through, each time the group finish a number a chorus of "... fuh orf, fuh orf, fuh orf" rises indeterminant and belchy from the anonymity of the hall. There is also sparse, and restrained applause in places. A few plastic mugs are thrown. The sound has picked up a bit, within the limits of the P.A. The number conveys the same urgent other worldly ascension, as say Television at their best. After the group, The Pop Group leave the stage and through the P.A. comes as he queues Blondie—or was it Elvis Costello; Nicky Horne's voice, the evening's compere, commenting, "Thank God for that . . ."

Why? Perhaps he thought it was too weird.

en continue

"Pop Group. The name is a deliberate paradox. Sinister, metallic, soundtrack of doom. They look stranger than they play. Compelling, disturbing and original." —From a recent NME round-up of new bands.

Well I suppose that's one way, if a totally misguided/ing one, of describing them. Firstly the name. It is indeed a paradox, but that neither implies the inaccessibilities or obscurity one might assume—

"I don't ever want to be obscure. I want to be understood by five year old children to eighty year old pensioners. If you can be number one with some really interesting lyrics. If Althea and Donna can get to number one, we can. And", long and accentuated, "we've got the good looks."

Mark the singer in the group, adds the last line almost as a wispy humorous trailer. Mark is the tall one, a physical characteristic which will lead future articles to describe him (quite accurately) as 'gangling'. He grins broadly, converses excitedly, if at times elliptically, is the most visibly 'intellectual', of the group, and also its central driving force. In conversation one can feel he is, at

OVER THE CLIFTON BRIDGE AND INTO THE POP GROUP

times, conscious of picking a way through the barb of language, to make his speech as effective and subtly forceful as possible.

Apart from Mark, The Pop Group consist of—from left to right Gareth and John, on guitars (Gareth also plays bits of piano), Bruce on drums and Simon on bass. Gareth is the most impatiently extrovert of the group, an impish joker, although at times this is clouded over by a tired passivity. The others, John, Bruce and Simon are physically quieter, without the jostling activity of the guitarist, but aware, talkative individuals. They are, as a whole, very likable, young, middle-late teenage, while their voices have the soft lyricism which betrays their Bristol roots. Bristol may help to explain the healthily unique and the explicitly individualistic approach they have nurtured. Bruce's language, in

contrast to Mark's, is one of quiet conviction, a lilting intensity where ideas and thought build persuasively from their inception:

"You've got to produce something . . . to shake them (the audience) into something new, into a state of confusion, shake them out of themselves, put them back in another person."

I certainly believe in human ability. What the mind can do . . . without technology, machines". The whole group are extremely wary of technology, to the extent that there is a number, 'Science is Devine' dealing incisively with these fears.

This though is only a small part of what The Pop Group feel themselves to be about. About using their power/position/platform to push people towards a new awareness . . .

Mark:—"If we can open people to the possibilities. The way people live their lives at the moment, just normal people. They only use one percent of their minds. There's so many things people can do. It's been proved that . . . the way they're developing human power, psycho kineticism, and teleportation and ESP. Soon anybody will be able to do it. Except they're being

RICK MANN



taught not to recognise it. The Wilhelm Reich thing about each child is jesus, until his parents have got hold of him. Put in a narrow path about an inch wide, when there's a mile of possibilities."

"Speak Chain lightning/Words of Blue Glass
Smash the sound barrier/Steal the speed of light
Bury the Sun, and drink up/drink up The Knight
Please don't sell your dreams"

This is the crux of The Pop Group, or standing back for a moment, this is their potential. It is a potential of atomised, energised positivism. And it's a positivism which exudes, oblivious to its own faults, all the innocence and hope that the strongest forms of youth culture aspire to. It is a similar total declaration as Patti Smith's own art and positivism. It is one that insists that you go to, enter their definitions/consciousness/world, rather than letting it drift passively to you, the listener.

Perhaps at the moment, it isn't particularly obvious. They are, after all being sold as a weird, ominously intellec-

tual band . . . 'only the intense can dance without moving', and all that instant jazz. Even so, underpinning this 'intensity', lies the same, if shrouded commitment.

It is not surprising then that at the Lyceum backstage is an old friend of the group, John, the head of Britain's Druid circle. In keeping with this, it is possible that The Pop Group will play the Glastonbury Fayre over the mid-summer equinox. In a similar vein the main topic of pre-gig chatter is the very strange events surrounding the shrouded Tomb of Turin.

Religion, or at least delving into various mystical disciplines, and their philosophies, one soon realises, is very much a central concern and vibe within most of the group. Mark will tell you of his automatic writing, a result of Zen meditation, or of, "a friend who has a synthesizer which plays the scales of the i-ching." Later he will continue, "I believe in giving things up to randomness . . . like with oracle blocks. Daousts, when they have a decision, they just throw an oracle block—they say yes or no to it . . ."

Visions indeed of a sculptured nirvana, maybe most immediately redolent of hippies, the summer of love, Haight-Ashbury and flowers, but after the initial glance even more so of Kerouac, Beat, Acid Tests, and Merry Pranksters, and especially speed-rapper Neal Cassidy.

But despite all the various parallels, The Pop Group are very definitely neither about psychedelic or beatnik revivalism, even if within the whole camp, there is a glowing admiration for Cassidy. They, I'm sure, know their feet are nearer the eighties than the sixties, and they also know the air, environment is very different. There is the same conviction, the same open experimentation with any genre which comes their way, or suggests interest both in experience and results. But it is in reference to today, an attitude that is undisputedly very different. Bruce—"It couldn't possibly (work) because in a way they had it worked out. Because if you don't leave a few things open—so something can come in, it can't possibly operate..."

Mark tags along without a hint of

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YEARS MODEL OR WILTED APHORISM?

Behind The Rise And Rise Of Stiff Records

RECORD COMPANY INTO A MAINSTREAM CULT RECORD COMPANY; WAS LAST OCTOBER'S BUNCH OF STIFFS' TOUR, OUT OF WHICH WAS WEENED NOT ONLY A LIVE ALBUM, BUT ENOUGH PRESS COVERAGE TO MAKE EVEN THE MOST NEUROTIC P.R. MAN CONTENT.

SINCE THEN, WITH CO-FOUNDER RIVIERA LEAVING TO HELP FORM RADAR, STIFF HAVE TONED DOWN THE EXCESSES, AND SUBTLY BUT DISTINCTLY CHANGED TACK IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PREVAILING TRENDS OF THE MOMENT.

IF THOUGH, THE PACKAGE TOUR—FIVE INCESTUOUSLY INTER-RELATED BANDS PLAYING A TOURS' WORTH OF HALF-HOUR SETS; IT WAS THE APEX OF RIVIERA'S OUTLANDISH MEDIA GAMERY, THEN IT WAS ALSO REMINISCENT OF 1973'S 'NAUGHTY RYTHMS' PACKAGE BILL WHICH BROUGHT THE LIKES OF DR FEELGOOD, KOKOMO, AND CHILLIE WILLIE AND THE RED HOT PEPPERS TO A WIDER AUDIENCE.

WHICH IS NO REAL SURPRISE, SINCE ANDREW JAKEMAN, NEE RIVIERA, ALONG WITH CHRIS FENNICK (THEN THE FEELGOODS' TOUR MANAGER AND MANAGER RESPECTIVELY) INITIATED THAT ENTIRE PACKAGE.

BOTH RIVIERA'S AND STIFF'S OTHER CO-FOUNDER DAVE ROBINSON HAVE LONG ESTABLISHED ROOTS IN THE 70'S PUB-ROCK BOOM. ROBINSON WAS CENTRAL TO THE RUNNING OF ISLINGTON'S 'HOPE AND ANCHOR' PUB-ROCK'S NORTH LONDON MECCA—AND THE KEY FIGURE IN THE EX-BRINSIES' LINK-UP WITH GRAHAM PARKER, WHOM HE NOW MANAGES. RIVIERA ALSO LOOKED AFTER THE CHILLIES—AND STARTED A PROTOTYPE STIFF, REVELATION TO DISTRIBUTE THEIR DEBUT ALBUM,—UNTIL THEY BROKE UP AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THE PACKAGE. LAST YEAR THE TWO BORROWED £400 FROM THE FEELGOODS' LEE BRILLEAUX, AND STARTED PLANNING THE STIFF MAIL-ORDER EMPIRE.

WHAT THEY LAUNCHED WAS A RECORD COMPANY WHICH SO INTIMATELY KNEW THE PUBLIC'S PSYCHE THAT, FROM ITS' INCEPTION, STIFF, AND PARTICULARLY RIVIERA, HASN'T, AT LEAST IN ENTREPRENEURIAL TERMS, PUT A FOOT WRONG.

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THEM EN ROUTE TO FRANCE'S FIRST PUNK FESTIVAL AT MONT DE MARSON.

BY PRODUCING THE DAMNED, LOWE GOT INSTANT PUNK CREDIBILITY. BY SIGNING THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE, ESPECIALLY IN THE AUTUMN OF '76 WHEN ANY MAJOR LABEL WAS LOATH TO TOUCH THE VOLITILE PUNK ANIMAL, AS WELL AS BEING STYLISHLY DIFFERENT, AND FIERCELY INDEPENDENT, STIFF PICKED UP ON SIMILAR INSTANTANEOUS POINTS. THUS MOST ANYTHING STIFF TOUCHED, SOILED, AND HYPERED WAS GIVEN FAR MORE PRESS ATTENTION, THAN IF THEY HAD COME OUT ON SAY, C.B.S. OR FOR THAT MATTER CHISWICK, - STIFF'S IMMEDIATE INDEPENDENT COMPETITOR. WITNESS THE ATROCIOUSLY MEDIOCRE RELEASES FROM PLUMMET AIRLINES, AND THE TYLA GANG, GAMBLERS WHICH DIDN'T PAY OFF PERHAPS, BUT RAPIDLY FORGOTTEN COMPARED TO THOSE THAT DID. SUCH AS NICK LOWE'S 'SO IT GOES', THE DAMNED'S 'NEW ROSE', AND RICHARD HELL'S 'BLANK GENERATION'; THE LATTER A MARKETING DEAL WITH NEW YORK'S ORK LABEL; AND IN HINDSIGHT WITH HELL BECOMING HIP PROPERTY - A COOL MOVE, COMPLETELY SOLD 10,000 COPIES EACH, AND WERE SWIFTLY DELETED, ANOTHER NEAT MARKETING PLOY; AIMED AT MYTHOLOGISING AND ESOTERICISING ALL GROUPS CONCERNED.

ABOVE ANYTHING ELSE ALL THREE SINGLE'S SHOW STIFF'S CAPACITY TO CREATE RATHER THAN FOLLOW TRENDS; SOMETHING THEY HAVE SINCE CONTINUED WITH RESILIENT DETERMINATION (FOR INSTANCE, HOW MUCH OF DEVO'S SUDDEN PUBLICITY ASCENSION IN THIS COUNTRY, WAS THEIR BOWIE/ENO CONNECTION, AND HOW MUCH THE RESULT OF THEIR INTERIM DEAL WITH STIFF?!) IT IS SOMETHING WHICH OTHER LABELS, WHATEVER SCALE HAVE HARDLY EVER ACHIEVED. VIRGIN HAD IT ONCE WITH ALL THEIR HATFIELDS, HENRY COWS, AND GONGS; ISLAND HAD IT AT THEIR INCEPTION WITH TRAFFIC, CRIMSON, AND TULL, AND AGAIN MORE INCONSPICUOUSLY WITH THE WAILERS. STIFF HAVE IT STILL, BUT HOW LONG IT WILL LAST IS HARD TO TELL.

LOWE HAS, OF COURSE, MOVED ON, FOLLOWING RIVIERA INTO RADAR. FROM THERE HAS COME THE FIRST SOLO ALBUM, "JESUS OF COOL", WHICH WITH A BIG PROMO PUSH, IS A TOP TWENTY HIT-MAKING HIM AN ALMOST OVERNIGHT STAR, A CONDITION WHICH HE PROBABLY FINDS AT ONCE DISORIENTATING AND PLEASURABLE.

EVERYONE KNOWS THE ALBUM; ITS' EVEN BECOME A RADIO PLAYLIST FAVOURITE; ITS' HYBRID POPPISHNESS, ITS' LIKEABLE IMMEDIACY, ITS' COMPLETE ABSENCE OF EMOTIONS, ALMOST AN ALTERNATE MODE OF DISCO.

IN A SENSE 'JESUS OF COOL' IS THE ONLY REAL STATEMENT OF THE RAPIDLY LANGUISHING POWERPOP MILIEU. LOWE'S MUSIC HAS THE SAME CELEBRATION OF TRIVIA, BORN MORE OUT OF CYNICISM THAN ANYTHING ELSE. UNLIKE THE YOUNGER SLEW OF BANDS HE HAS MADE NO ATTEMPT TO REVEL IN, OR RECREATE DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF PRE-PSYCHEDELIA POP AND RAP, OF BEAT OR BUBBLEGUM, INNOCENCE AND VIRGINITY HIP. IF YOU LIKE YOUR MUSIC PERFECT IN CONSTRUCTION, BUT ALIENATED FROM ANY FEELINGS, THEN, 'JESUS...' IS A PERFECT LULLABY. IF YOU PREFER IT COMPASSIONATE, IF FLAWED - ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU FEEL THE PERSON CONCERNED IS SELLING HIMSELF SHORT, THEN IT ISN'T.

WITH BOTH LOWE AND COSTELLO DEPARTED FROM THE ROOSTING NEST, STIFF, IT APPEARS ARE CONCENTRATING ON BREAKING IAN DURY IN

A MAJOR WAY MOST THINGS HAVE ALREADY BEEN SAID ABOUT DURY WITHIN THE ROCK-PRESS AND LITTLE IF ANYTHING HAS TO BE ADDED. HE DID WEAR A SAFETY PIN THROUGH ONE OF HIS EARS A COUPLE OF YEARS BACK. HIS OLD BAND, DID PLAY, AT LEAST IN LONDON'S SEEDIER CORNERS; - SOME OF THE BEST, AND NOT THE LEAST BIZARRE GIGS. THEY DID DISAPPEAR BECAUSE OF FINANCIAL PROBLEMS, ALTHOUGH PERHAPS HE WAS BOUND TO RESURFACE ONCE STIFF GOT WELL UNDERWAY, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING DURY HAS EVER BEEN, ONE OF THE MEDIA'S UNDERDOGG DARLINGS (THEY'RE CALLED RENAISSANCE MEN NOW, I HEAR.)

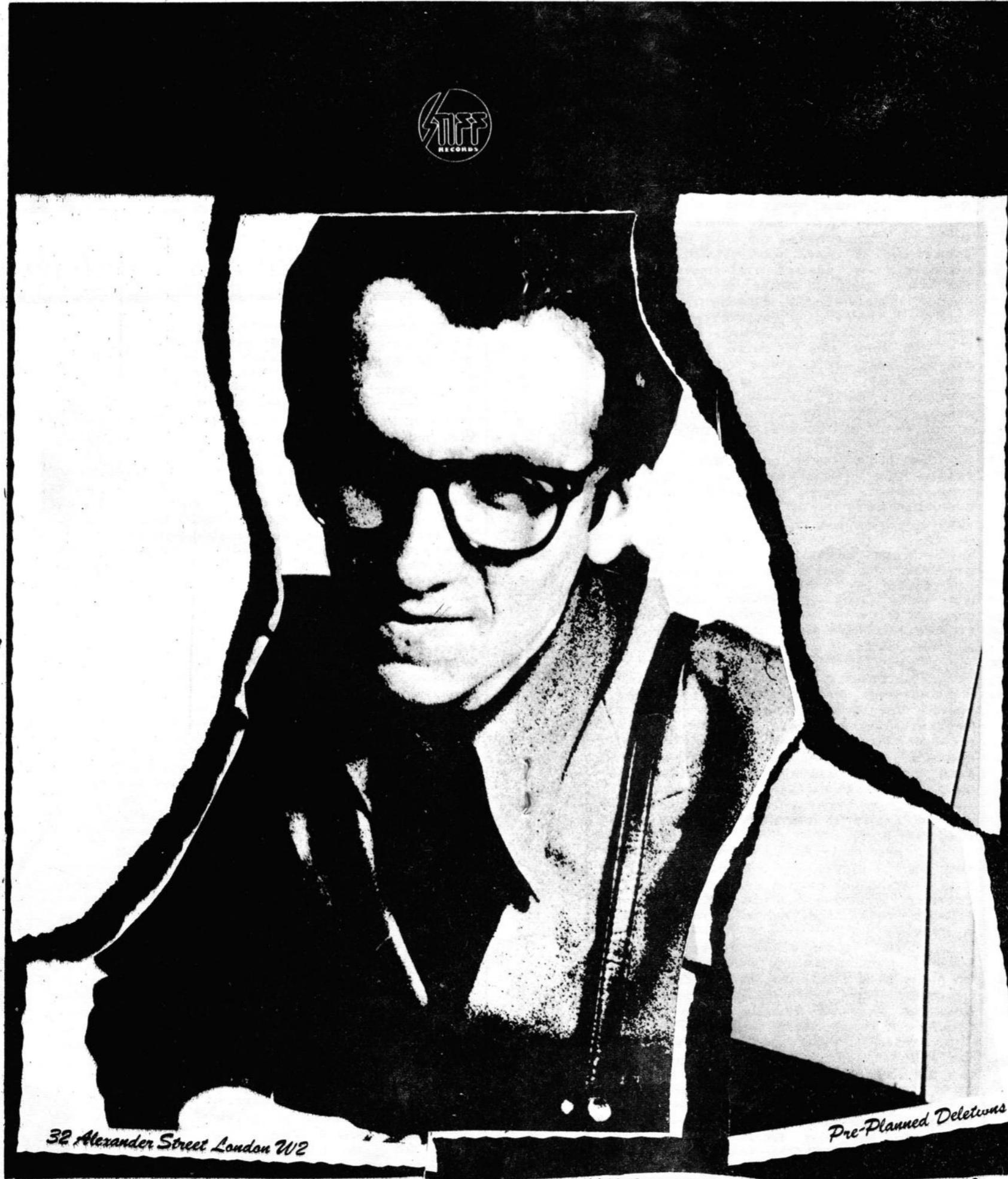
AND TO LAUNCH HIS SOLO CAREER IAN DURY RELEASED AN IDIOSYNCRATIC JEWEL OF A SINGLE, OF COURSE, "SEX'N' DRUGS'N' ROCK 'N' ROLL". THEN THERE WAS THE, "NEW BOOTS AND PANTIES" ALBUM WHICH HAS ALREADY BEEN LAUDED TO DEATH BY THE WEEKLIES. SUFFICE IT TO MENTION THAT THE MUSIC AND LYRICS ARE BOTH EQUALLY RICH AND EVOCATIVE, AT TIMES SENSUOUS AT OTHERS PURE RAUNCH, AND THROUGHOUT EXTREME IN COMPASSION.

THAT IS REALLY WHAT STRIKES ONE ABOUT DURY, HIS COMPASSION AND HUMANITY TOWARDS HIS FELLOW KIND - WHICH PERMEATES THROUGH THE LYRICS WITH COLOUR, SPICE, AND WARMTH.

SIMILARLY ON STAGE IN A SANDY BROWN JACKET AND MATCHING TROUSERS AND WITH A PINK CARNATION LOPPING OUT OF ITS' REQUISITE LAPEL, CUTTING A SHARP DICKENSIAN FIGURE, DURY IS WARMTH INCARNATE. HE ALSO HAS THE DISARMING TALENT FOR MANIPULATING AN AUDIENCE. WHEN THEY ENCORE WITH A SECOND, "SEX..." AND DURY SHOUTS, "POGO" THE AUDIENCE SEETHE VERTICALLY IN COMPLETE SUBMISSION.

'POGO SUBMISSION' HERE SEEKS AN ODDLY RELEVANT PHRASE. FOR WITH DURY, NICK LOWE, AND EVEN MORE SO WITH ELVIS COSTELLO, STIFF RECORDS HAVE ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY REDIRECTED, RECHANNELED THE EMERGING PATH OF NEW WAVE, AND TO A GREAT EXTENT REDEFINED IT AS A GENRE.

FOR THIS ONE CAN'T UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF STIFF. OVER THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS WITH MASSIVE MEDIA SUPPORT: ESPECIALLY AMONG THOSE WRITERS WHO DUG THE CONCEPT OF PUNK, BUT COULDN'T QUITE STOMACH THE MUSICAL ACTUALITY, (AND ALL THAT IT IMPLIED,) STIFF HAVE INFILTRATED THE SCENE GIVING IT A NEW BREADTH OF DIMENSION. BECAUSE OF ITS' ORIGINAL CREDIBILITY, AND ITS' ZEALOUS INDEPENDENCE, DURING ITS' FORMATIVE STAGES, MUCH OF WHAT STIFF REPRESENTS, WHICH IS A CONCENTRATED AND COHESIVE RENAISSANCE OF MANY OF THE OLD PUB-ROCK LUMINARIES HAS BEEN A CONCENT AND EAGERLY ACCEPTED BY MUCH OF THE THEN NEW PUNK COTERIE. EVEN IF IT DID HAVE THE DAMNED ON ITS' BOOKS; (ALTHOUGH IN A SENSE THEY WERE CLOSER TO PUB BANDS THAN PUNK ONES;) STIFF'S EARLIEST LEADING LIGHTS, RIVIERA, AND ROBINSON, AND PAUL CONROY, - WHO MOVED FROM MANAGING THE KURSAAL FLYERS (HOW LONG BEFORE RE-GROUPED VERSIONS OF THAT BAND TURN UP ON STIFF? RE, THE RECORDS) COME FROM NEARLY DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED CAMPS TO THAT OF THE MALCOLM MCLAREN 'SEX' SHOP CAMP; - BERNARD RHODES, PISTOLS, CLASH, SOPHIE RICHMOND, JAMIE MACGREGOR, ET AL - IT ISN'T THE LEAST SURPRISING COMPARING THE LATTERS' REAL IDEOLOGICAL ASPIRATIONS TO THE DAMNED'S/STIFF'S BLOATED OVERKILL, THAT THE UK ANARCHY TOUR WAS RIFE WITH INTERNAL ROWS BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES. STIFF, AND FOR THAT MATTER RADAR, NEVER HAD ANY OF THE INITIAL IDEALISM OF THE PUNK



THE AMERICAN 'THIS YEARS' MODEL' HAS A REALLY GREAT TRACK, 'RADAR' WHICH RADAR SHOULD RELEASE AS A SINGLE - PRONTO. INSTEAD OF DROPS LIKE 'PUMP IT UP' - THAT IS IF ELVIS REALLY WANTS TO BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS HIM...QUICK...



CAUCUS. BOTH COMPANIES ARE MADE UP OF THE MORE IMAGINATIVE BUT EQUALLY CYNICAL END OF THE MUZIC BIZ SPECTRUM, WHERE POLITICS IS A VERY DIRTY WORD, BUT WHERE 'FUN'—HOWEVER DIRTY, IS A FINANCIAL ONE.

UNLIKE ANY OF THE NEW SMALL RECORD LABELS, THE STIFF GANG HAVE HAD YEARS OF HUSTLING EXPERIENCE INSIDE THE MUSIC CAPITAL. THUS STIFF AND ESPECIALLY RIVIERA SEEM TO HAVE A COMMANDING PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO MANIPULATE AND EXPLOIT BOTH AND PUBLIC, AND EVEN APPARENTLY ISLAND RECORDS.

ESPECIALLY AFTER THE STORIES THAT WENT WITH THEIR SIGNING AND RESIGNING THE MARKETING DEAL. STIFF (AND NOW RADAR) THROUGH THEIR THEIR VARIOUS PLOWS HAVE NEVER BEEN SHORT OF METHODS TO HYPE THEIR LATEST SIGNING. EVEN THE SEEMINGLY INNOCOUS, BUT WILDFIRE GROWTH OF BADGES OVER THE LAST YEAR WAS, TO A GREAT EXTENT, INITIATED BY STIFF, WHO SEEMINGLY HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE OBVIOUS DEMAND OF BELONGING TO A CLOSED STATUS GROUP, THE TENDER OF MEMBERSHIP HERE BEING THE INCONSEQUENTIAL BADGE, OR BADGE DELUXE;— WHICH CO-INCIDENTALLY EXPOSES THE READER TO SOME STIFF APHORISM OR WITTICISM.

SIMILARLY THEY HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE PUBLICS INSATIABLE THIRST FOR COLLECTABLE UNIQUENESS. THUS EVERY LAST IRRELEVANCY BECOMES COLLECTABLE, SUDDENLY NOTHING/ EVERYTHING IS TRASH, AND INSTANTLY NON-DISPOSABLE. IT REACHES ITS' EMOTIVE APEX WITH THE ACTUAL RECORDS— WHERE SOME FORM OF UNIQUE MARKING— DOUBLE B-SIDES; SEMI-INSTANT DELETIONS, LUREX VINYL, ETC, ETC, ENSURES SOME FORM OF ENHANCED COLLECTABILITY.

TO SOME THIS IS CALLED STYLE, TO OTHERS HYPE, BUT WHATEVER ITS' NAME IT KEEPS STIFF IN THERE WITH ALMOST CONTINUOUS PRESS COVERAGE AS THE WEEKLIES TRY TO OUT-ANTICIPATE EACH OTHER AS TO WHAT THE BOYS IN THE BACKROOMS WILL COME UP WITH NEXT.

THE MUSIC PRESS, OF COURSE, WITH THEIR SEARCH FOR THRILLS, FRILLS AND ALL THE OTHER GIMMICK LADEN TRANSIENCIES OF MASS CULTURE;— BOTH LAP IT UP, AND NURTURE ITS VERY CREATION. FOR A TIME, THEY CAPERED ON ABOUT ELVIS COSTELLO'S REAL IDENTITY, WHICH KEPT COSTELLO VERY MUCH IN THE GENERAL EYE, AND MORE IMPORTANLY CONTINUED HIS IMPLICIT MYTHOLOGISING. INDEED IT'S MORE LIKELY THAT RIVIERA HAD A GOOD DEAL TO DO WITH THE CREATING OF THESE STORIES, AND WITH THEIR CONTINUED PRESENCE IN THE PRESS.

COSTELLO IS UNDOUBTEDLY RIVIERA'S MASTERSTROKE, AND ACCORDINGLY IS BEING PRIMED FOR STARDOM, EVERY STEP OF THE WAY CAREFULLY MONITORED SO THAT EACH MYTH IS FIRMLY IMPLANTED IN THE ROCK PUBLIC'S SUBLIMINAL BEFORE THE NEXT FOOT TREADS UNCERTAINLY FORWARD. IN THIS VEIN THE STIFFS' PACKAGE WAS PRIMARILY A VEHICLE TO LAUNCH COSTELLO, ALTHOUGH IN THE EVENT IT PROBABLY DID THE SAME FOR IAN DURY.

AND AS IT IS—with his move to RADAR AND THE SUBSEQUENT ANTI-HERO HARD-SELL PACKAGING OF HIS SECOND ALBUM, COSTELLO IS BECOMING A HOUSEHOLD NAME,— PERHAPS THE CLOSEST APPROXIMATION TO A STAR.

THIS SECOND ALBUM ARRIVED ONLY EIGHT MONTHS AFTER THE FIRST,— THE DEBUT "MY AIM IS TRUE", ON STIFF. "AIM" OF COURSE WAS THE ALBUM WHICH POCKETED, OUT OF NOWHERE, ECSTATIC REVIEWS FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE MUSIC PRESS.

SUCH A REACTION, ALTHOUGH PARTIALLY THE RESULT OF THE ARGUABLE QUALITY TO THE ALBUM, HAS PROBABLY A GREAT MORE TO DO WITH THE VARIOUS ROCK WRITERS' OWN PAST, MANY OF WHOM ORIGINATE FROM THE LATE SIXTIES, EARLY SEVENTIES, AND HAVE SPENT YEARS PINING FOR ARTISTE'S TO FILL THE OBVIOUS GAP LEFT BY THE LIKES OF DYLAN, VAN MORRISON, AND THE BAND. THE RESULT HAS BEEN, IN PASSING

YEARS, BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, AND GRAHAM PARKER, AND THE WHOLE GAMUT OF BANDS AND MUSICIANS WORKING WITHIN THIS EASILY RECOGNISABLE GENRE; WHITE AMERICAN RYTHM 'N' BLUES.

COSTELLO IS THE SAME, BASICALLY, ALTHOUGH HE DOES HAVE THE ADDED ADVANTAGE OF BEING, AT TIMES, A QUITE EXTRAORDINARY LYRICWRITER (A REAL ADVANTAGE CONSIDERING HOW MANY ROCK WRITERS ARE ENGLISH LIT GRADUATES.) HE IS A SIXTIES SYNTHESIST, A HYBRID OF RYTHM 'N' BLUES STYLES—: ALL HIS GROUP HAVE DEVELOPED EXTREME SIXTIES STYLISATIONS IN THEIR PLAYING; THE HIGHLY MIXED BASS RUNS, THE SEMI-MILITARISTIC HAMMERHEAD DRUMMING, ETC...— WHICH IS, AT LEAST BY ITS' NEW FOUND POPULARITY, BECOMING A GENRE UNTO ITSELF.

COSTELLO'S MUSIC, FOR ALL IT'S CLEVER ADAPTION OF STYLES, HAS NONE OF THE LYRICAL IDEALISM, AND MUSICAL THREAT OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES, SUCH AS THE CLASH OR BUZZCOCKS. HIS MUSIC IS ALMOST THE SOUND OF THE STATUS QUO— IT IS AS SOUND (LIKE ALL THESE NEW SIXTIES POP OUTFITS—BLONDIE, BOOMTOWN RATS) DANCABLY LIKEABLE, CONTORT WITH EMOTION, AND IMMENSELY SALEABLE, JUST LIKE FLEETWOOD MAC.

INDEED COSTELLO SEEMS SET TO SPLIT OPEN A LARGE PORTION OF AMERICANA JUST AS— WHEN THE TIMES COMES, THE BOOMTOWN RATS WILL; AND HOW IF CBS MANAGE TO PUSH THEM INTO THE LAND OF MORE, "COMMERCIALLY VISIBLE PRODUCT," THE CLASH MAY, AND HOW UNLESS THERE ARE SOME RADICAL CHANGES A GROUP LIKE THE BUZZCOCKS WON'T. BUT COSTELLO'S MUSIC IS EASILY BRITAINS' MOST EMINENTLY PACKAGABLE, IN A COUNTRY WHICH DEMANDS ROCK MUSIC AS A LAS VEGAN SPECTACULAR ENTERTAINMENT, WITHOUT ANY EXTERNAL CONSEQUENCES. ALREADY CBS, COSTELLO'S AMERICAN LABEL, HAVE PUT "AIM" INTO THE TOP FIFTY WHILE THE BAND HAVE TOURED THREE TIMES TO LAVISH ACCLAIM FROM THE LIKES OF 'ROLLING STONE' AND, 'TROUSER PRESS'.

ALL THIS FITS PERFECTLY WITH RADAR. RADAR RECORDS, OR CLADHURST, RIVIERA'S NEW PERCHING POST APPEARS A VERY DIFFERENT COMPANY TO STIFF. RIGHT FROM THE HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED LABEL DESIGN THERE IS AN EXTREME PROFESSIONALISM IN ALL THEIR PROMO EXACTITUDE. THIS MAY BE DUE TO RIVIERA'S NEW ASSOCIATES, ANDREW LAUDER'S AND MARTIN DAVIES' LONG AND DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY. THERE AGAIN IT MAY BE BECAUSE RADAR HAVE MORE MONEY.

SO FAR THOUGH THE ADVERTISING FOR BOTH RADAR'S MAIN ATTRACTIONS, ELVIS COSTELLO AND NICK LOWE HAS DWELT (EXTREMELY SUCCESSFULLY IN TERMS OF FINANCIAL REMUNERATION) IN VERY HARD IMAGES, PLAYING ON THE READERS' CURIOUSITY FOR THE UNUSUAL AND THE DISARMING.

WHETHER THE SAME WILL BE USED WITH RADAR'S NEW AND LITTLE KNOWN SIGNINGS IS DIFFICULT TO TELL. CERTAINLY PERE UBU, AND TO SOME EXTENT THE SOFT BOYS— IN THE POST PUNK SOPHISTOCATE MOOD OF THE MOMENT, LOOK THE KIND OF GROUPS RADAR WILL TRY WITH.

MEANWHILE ACROSS THE OTHER SIDE OF LONDON STIFF SIT PUSHING THEIR DEVO SINGLES FOR ALL THEIR WORTH. THERE HAS BEEN IN THE STIFF BOYS CAMP A SIMILAR



MOVE TOWARDS SOPHISTICATION, ALTHOUGH UNLIKE RADAR THEY SEEM IN NO HURRY TO SIGN UP NEW GROUPS, AND INSTEAD ARE PREPARING THE WAY FOR THE VARIOUS U.S GREAT LAKE BANDS, WITH WHOM THEY'VE ENTERED LICENCING DEALS, INCLUDING THE FIRST OF THESE, THE PROMISING JANE AIRE AND THE BELVEDERE'S.

A LONG TIME AGO, VARIOUS PEOPLE—RICHARD WILLIAMS AND THE LIKE APPEARED ON ONE OF THOSE INTERMINABLE OLD GROANER'S TV SHOWS. THEY TALKED ABOUT PUB-ROCK, AND PRAISED IT FOR REVIVING LIVE MUSIC, BUT AT THE SAME TIME CONCLUDED THAT IT WAS EXCEPTIONALLY INSULAR, AND AS SUCH WAS UNLIKELY TO REALLY DEVELOP. NOW FIVE(?) YEARS LATER STIFF AND RADAR, THEIR COMPONENTS, WISER AND OLDER, ARE THE RESULT OF THAT DEVELOPMENT, THE NEXUS OF PUB MUSIC. BOTH ARE ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESSES, WHICH ALTHOUGH FINANCIALLY PALE IN COMPARISON TO THE VIRGIN MACHINE—(EXPECTED 1977 TURNOVER=£20 MILLION)—, ARE BOTH RESHAPING THE NEW WAVE, LEADING IT OUT OF ITS' INITIAL BURST OF FEVERED RADICALISM AND BACK INTO THE STRAIGHTEN PATH OF HIP CAPITALISM.

NOTHING, IT APPEARS DOES REALLY CHANGE DESPITE JOHNNY ROTTEN'S PROCLAMATION (WHICH THESE TWO COMPANIES HAVE TURNED INSIDE OUT.) MAYBE STIFF WERE LAST YEARS MODEL, AND PERHAPS EVEN RADAR ARE THIS YEARS'.

AND IF THEY ARE, CHEAP STARS OR NOT, THEY'LL DOUBTLESS MAKE A WORTHY HYPE OUT OF IT.



WORDS AND MUSIC FROM JUST OFF BRIXTON HIGH STREET :THIS HEAT.

"This Heat has played for two years and some weeks with various names some lasting longer than others. At first there was a duo called dolphin logic who seemed to have an obsession about water, they/it was a living room duet"—Gareth

The three of us played our first gig together on Friday 13th '76, three weeks after Gareth had started playing Organ. Somebody described the gig as 'magical' and there certainly was an element of magic there"—Charles Bullen

This Heat are beginning to get their name in the press; references are being made; columns are being written; and terms like 'new musick', 'new wave intellectuals', are being tossed loosely around.

As yet they haven't played many gigs (only one outside London). In London they have avoided the usual venues in preference to those which have a potential for both communication and provocation. Similarly their music has no germ of compromise in it. It is like all experimenting/al music, one that demands some kind of, even if a completely negative, reaction from the listener/viewer. And like experimental music it demands that the listener (be he writer or otherwise) lay down his usual touchstone for listening—reference points, influences, etc and attempt to start again without such preconceptions.

To me their music is about moods, about different textures, some more difficult to relate to than others—while to other writers they are about contrasts. Certainly it is extremely evocative, for instance, 'Dave Jones' Locker' (not waving, but drowning) conveys, at least to me, a terribly intense, but passive futility of purpose, a complete abstention from anything.

This Heat are comprised of two Charles's (Hayward and Bullen, on drums and guitars respectively). Despite disliking comparisons, "... please not another shopping list", both times I saw them, Hayward's drumming reminded me of watching Magma's Christian Vander. They are completed by Gareth, who joined after Charles H had taught him four chords. He also operates the

tape recorders which are used extensively within the performance of the music.

I first saw/heard them last November at the Roundhouse Downstairs, a gig—it later transpires—which is considered to have been little short of a disaster.

Already then, even if (for because it) took place in mid-afternoon this gig attracted enough to form a long queue, almost curling into the Chalk Farm Road. Most of the audience are probably the inquisitive—having heard one or both of the two sessions the band have done for John Peel. Some though have seen the group from that first gig, eight months earlier, or further back.

Afterwards I come out strangely disorientated, especially when passing the crowd waiting to get into the larger Roundhouse's age-old Sunday do. The music has been a swell of differences, of contrasts, and moods, and of colours juxtaposed—sometimes so they sound consciously fitting, and at others as if only accident and chance has brought them together. It is impossible to situate the music in any preconceived framework.

CH—"There are no reference points at least none to stand between. Our influences are countless and their ranks are constantly being swelled."

G—"the reference points for this heat are up to you, i can only refer you to your imagination . . ."

At the downstairs there had been benches for the audience to sit on. The seats are there, perhaps, to define the situation, and to define the reaction, or again they are there to upset one. In this context, there is the usual question of accessibility, one of the main red herrings which the music press will fire at This Heat, of being weird, inaccessible, and the like.

CH—"If people have heard nothing like us before, that's one set of coefficients to listen to us from. If people can relate to us, and the strength of having heard similar sounds elsewhere then that is another. It is doubtful that any two people listen to us from the same point on this hypothetical graph . . . whether these different people (i.e. all the people who ever hear us) like us or not is up (or is it down?) to them."

G—"The uninitiated are in the same position as me. i don't know them and

they don't know me. how do you do? people are either interested or not. people are welcome to hear us. our current project is making a record. it makes me impatient to release this record as we are talking about something that most people haven't heard. we don't like doing a lot of gigs, most groups wear themselves out by trotting out the same information until it just becomes parrot music. ah! there you are i've written the word music. yes differentiate between music and noise pollution. a machine that crowds out your thought in a factory, bombs going off—that is noise pollution."

This album is now finished. They have been using dead time to record it. They will probably try and do some kind of deal with any interested parties. "We look forward to working with a forward looking record company." Before this, there will be a single. It will probably be 'Makeshift Swahili'; when I saw them, Charles Hayward said it was about "language barriers", it seemed almost an ironical picture of that particular gig situation. The provocative nature of the music seemed in itself an attempt at communication.

CH—"Yes, we attempt to communicate through sound pure and simple, through words with attention to a different way of using language, and a stage through light, absence of light, gesture, expression (some of it is involuntary, some of it accidental, some intended, some automatic). Newcomers, seasoned veterans it makes no difference."

In the same vein Gareth—"I want this heat to accommodate lots of different activities. some things will be easily absorbed others not. we are all interested in video for instance it has such remarkable similarities with sound recording tape that we feel some of our methods of making sound could easily find an extension in visual terms, i do not mean boring expensive films of us miming/pretending to give concerts in shepherds bush and candid shots of us



climbing into planes. I would like to work with someone who is equally attracted to spontaneous improvisation as prepared and rehearsed material". (They are still looking for a "creative engineer" to join the band as a fourth member.)

We sit in their Brixton rehearsal room (a disused abattoir, taken over by sculptors) in deckchairs, and on stools. A point which seems to follow on, is that This Heat, at least to the outsider are a band who are dealing in, and conceiving their music from ideas, rather than emotions, although the effect is potentially extremely emotional. Charles B... "Ideas link inextricably with emotions anyway. The large part of our music is either spontaneous by its birth in a spontaneous action. Sometimes these spontaneous actions may be analysed and limited/juxtaposed with each other... we all have a bit of the architect in us..."

CH—"An idea will suggest emotional landscapes (nature of people's activity), specific (including melodies, harmonies) sounds, and when appropriate word content—these four aspects any one of them can be the starting point, this can occur in various combinations. On the other hand we can set these aspects against each other and can walk, for your delight, an ambiguous tightrope..." So writing words is the result of which processes? "All possible processes. All channels open. Twenty four hour alert..." And the music? "Three people in a space with sound sources (visitors/voyeurs welcome)." And the terms 'new musick' and 'new wave intellectuals'. Gareth—"I think they are absurd, there is no such thing as new. For new wave read another bunch of people with widely different ideas. Some people imitate other people. Sometimes it sounds different sometimes I put people into categories I regret it. As for being intellectual. I don't think I succeed in that field. I failed practically every exam I ever took. I don't think I want to be one. Education is just about beginning to interest me now. I used to want to blow up schools but now I think I can see a reason for them being there. I just object to exams. I don't want people's marks. I'd rather exchange 'information' through discovery. A.S. Neill's free schools always seemed attractive when I went through the modern/comprehensive systems. My attitude to schools was very negative. I didn't contribute much. School got in my way. Yes, they taught me how to read and write. Is this relevant? I ask myself..."?

The rehearsal room is cold. There is only one small bar heater. Charles Hayward who is working in the evenings has still to arrive, Gareth looks tired and drawn, he has flu. There is a tape recorder, but it seems a better idea to have

them write their answers, where ambiguities and misunderstandings are less likely.

This Heat's name is probably about different types as opposed to levels of intensity, different manifestations of heat. "...how you listen to us, how you react to us will affect your reading of the name's implications. We are not going to tell you how to listen to what we do." Whether the redefinition of values, musical or otherwise, Punk has brought with it, will be able to accommodate, and react to This Heat, is for the future. As Charles Hayward says, "a relatively new broom, sweeps relatively clean." Hopefully it has swept clean enough.

Epilogue—They did write, some of it is incorporated above. They wrote on different types of paper. Gareth's has music lines, was typed, and someone (probably Charles B) has added, "Quite Good, but you must answer the questions". Charles B who is the tallest, and often has his hair in plaits, was obviously in a hurry, the paper is lined on both sides, and often the answers trail off in mid-sentence. Charles H wrote in red ink ink, answering each question separately, some at length, some with alarming alacrity. He often wears red, yellow and blue clothing (primary colours y'see...) ...

THE POP GROUP CON FROM THEIO

during one number he throws his arms out, in ungainly movement, one can see him clearly, a character out of Munch's 'The Scream'. It is very primal.

The rest of the group, perhaps acknowledging their singer's capacity to captivate, buzz around the stage, concentrating on their instruments, and the music.

And the music? It is not pop, nor is it any kissing cousin to Punk, or for that matter neu musick. Someone called them the Velvet Underground of the 1980s, which is not entirely inaccurate, but then again not too close. It is far more New York than Detroit. Some but not all, have underlying their construction, an absolutely riveting Television-esque feel. The rhythmic pulse and textural lead guitar, it results in the most immediate of their music. In contrast 'Dreams', 'Death, Why don't you come out and play' are far more edgy,

spiky pieces, with a sense of urgency that complements the various intensities of the lyrics.

Like the music, the lyrics are not pretty, but hard edged and cutting sounds. They range in subject matter—fate and predestination, self control, epiphany—harsh contrast to the normal lyrical fare. As Mark says, "Each song is like a bit of flesh torn from my body, and I'm worried that there won't be any bits of flesh left". He has been asked to read (alongside Sam Beckett) at a Bristol Festival, as one of the City's five best poets—"Within me and within the band there's a massive conflict between the bestial part and the intelligence part. There's a big split in me personally. Emotion and intellect. A lot of it is trying to get something which is bestial and intellectual at the same time..."

Meantime there is always the music business. Demo's have been made (incidentally engineered by Hugh Cornwell—friend, fan and benefactor) are making their rounds. Companies are watching, taking note, with Virgin and Radar out in front at the moment. Mark says the only record company he wants to be on is Brian Eno's Obscure label. He also says how disgusted they are with the music world and the music press, although he shows great interest in radical bodies, such as Rock In Opposition. "It's worse than bloody pilot (biblical metaphors, like bestial, animal ones come up with great frequency in his descriptive language). It's disgusting the way they act, and the way they look, it's so ugly."

But once signed, there is an album to contemplate, one which hopefully will facilitate the production services of both Syd Barrett and John Cale.

This is, of course, the future. The Pop Group remain in now—in Bristol playing appropriately twice a month, at approved venues, those with interesting possibilities. If, as has been put forward, 1978 is the year of Beefheart, in the sense that 1976/7 was so definitely Iggy Pop's—the interest and involvement in The Pop Group awaits...

In short The Pop Group stand alongside The Subway Sect, The Fall, and perhaps Siouxsie, as the most fascinating, most overtly potential of young groups, new wave, punk or not, that remain unsigned. They move in the labyrinthine forest of ideas, of vigour. They are the hope to overcome of Patti Smith, the psychic landscape of Munch, or even Ingmar Bergman (The Rite, The Seventh Seal), they are the time and militancy of Cassidy and Burroughs. I don't know if they're better than jumping from the twenty-fifth... or the thirtieth or the tenth... But if you're ready for another music in a different lifestyle, then The Pop Group are waiting, then you're only crime is waiting...

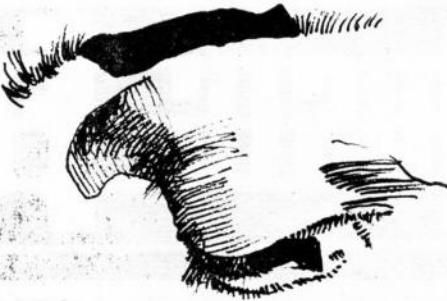
movement, and The Clash will find it difficult if not impossible to continue in contact with the base of that pyramid, depending on how aware and how far in control they really are of their situation. As for involved ideas, with political foundations, radio stations, clubs, and the like; these seem to have been seen completely within traditional terms, entrepreneurial and without any attempt to change the existing structure, the politics of escapism.

Fortunate it is then, for both The Clash and the media, that like some tumbling archangel breakdown van Tom Robinson, agit-rock that he is, has arrived in the nick of time, replacing The Clash as the most sophisticated populist political band. It is probable too, that those who saw The Clash in political terms, have swiftly moved a hefty portion of their allegiance onto firmer ground, raised clenched fists, and T.R.B.

Robinson's band, in its political integrity, is concrete and accessible, but not the stuff media can make good, lasting copy of for any length of time.

In the past, not surprisingly, genuine political bands have been unanimously ignored, or watched with a bemused eye, by the business machinery, perhaps because the integrity they demanded, made hype, and all it implies, impossible.

CLASH



... QUOTES FROM NAME, MELODY MAKER AND RELAXED HOT PRESS...

And hype is, if anything else, the entrance key to popular culture. Bands as diverse as Henry Cow and The Derelicts (a true garageband) have failed completely in their attempts to either assail or circumnavigate the limits of hype. How long then, can Tom Robinson hope to last once the present political voyeurism turns against the tide, from fashion to fad.

This won't happen with The Clash, because the rock media needs their brand of militancy for the same reasons they needed the Stones. Which will mean, they will not only survive the commotion, but cruise through it.

Which is a pity because it means that nothing has changed, the business has quickly, after its initial shock, recovered to dampen and devour the possibilities which once looked open, while the papers have sold an image, hyping the image into the pop consciousness. It may be cool to be complacent, but at one time Punk, with The Clash at its helm, could have had really radical repercussions.

There again, maybe I was too naively hopeful. After all Punk, and 1977 was its year, is essentially synonymous with fashion (but not trend and not politics) and in that area The Clash, along with McLaren's 'Seditionaries' clothes shop have helped to epitomise the new sartorial terrorism. But then there could be a good argument made out that rock'n' roll has more to do with clothes than music.

As for the music itself, this is neither time nor place. Personally I'm predisposed to most of it—ever since that fifth or sixth gig. Everyone knows they sing great, classic anthems about kids, and great lyrics to identify with—'London's Burning', 'Janie Jones', 'I'm so Bored With The USA' and '48 Thrills'—with passion and intensity. They got most of their press because of their political tag. They probably got most of their national popularity because of all the nice things said in the press. Their political (as opposed to rock'n'roll) gestures have about the same political zeal and effect as skateboarding up a high street.

The Clash then, look set to stay together for some time to come. If Bernie Rhodes has the integrity he suggests then he and the band will keep the political fervour. Otherwise . . .

Give a few years and they will probably play free in Hyde Park. Let's hope, unlike with The Stones, it's in support of, and not to diffuse something similar to the Vietnam demos.

TRYING
TO FAIL
INCORPORATE
IN THEIR
ATTEMPTS
TO ARM
THE CLASH
INTO A
PALATABLE
PRODUCT
FOR THE
AMERICAN
MARKET...

MUSIC FOR SOCIALISM

Apart from the more highly publicised antics of 1977, the last months have seen the emergence of smaller, highly articulate and potentially ambitious movements, binding together politics and music.

One is R.A.R.—Rock Against Racism, which after slowly building from a roots basis, has received, at least for such an organisation, publicity, recognition, and great success, amongst press and public alike.

Another lesser known organisation is 'Music For Socialism' which behind the slightly dour greyness of its title, is dealing with equally important issues.

Whether either organisation would have come about without the arrival of Punk is debatable, certainly R.A.R. was initially a reaction against Eric Clapton's nauseating remarks about Pakistanis eighteen months back, and the momentum started would have been extremely unlikely without the thriving links between some portions of the Punk and Reggae audiences.

With M.F.S. there has been no precedent—at least in this country, apart from the Workers' Music Association, but none dealing with the relationship between today's popular music and politics.

M.F.S. was formed in May 1976 from a loose group of some of Henry Cow, Redbrass, a jazz-rock band, Ian Hoare, an ex-'Let It Rock' journalist, Steve Beresford, the improvisational musician and, "quite a lot of folk musicians", such as Jack Warshaw.

Even if M.F.S. is running in unknown ground in this country, it does bear comparison with similar situations in Europe. Partially because of the socio-cultural differences that European countries have to Britain they have been far more extensively developed. In both Sweden and especially Italy where the relationship between various cultural activities and mediums, and active politics is far more advanced, alternative non-commercial organisations, for both live music and for record distribution, have become a real and viable contender to the omniscience of the music business corporates.

"The situation is just so different because most people are interested at least superficially in left politics, or left views and ways of doing things, and independent, alternative ways of distribution. Whereas in Britain most members of the public, most musicians, and most music journalists are not at all in independent alternative activities, they are only interested in the business as

MUSIC AND SOCIALISM? ARE THEY REALLY INCOMPATIBLE BEDFELLOWS ...?

MFS HAVE BEEN EXPLORING THE CONNECTIONS SINCE 1977 RESULTING BOTH IN EVENTS LIKE THEIR, 'SUMMER IN THE CITY', AND THE SETTING UP THE NEWER ROCK IN OPPOSITION GROUP.

entertainment, and all its ramifications, and what's hip at that particular time. So in Britain you're faced in very much an uphill struggle, whereas in Italy at least you've got a chance because at least you speak the same language, even if they don't care in what you're doing." So says Nick Hobbes.

Nick Hobbes is Henry Cow's manager—he prefers to say administrator. He is involved in M.F.S. and also newer projects Rock In Opposition and most recently Musicnet. The difference between Italy and Britain is probably most compactly summed up when he comments on setting up tours in the two countries. While Italy is "very easy", Britain is "extraordinarily difficult".

"In Italy you've got a very strong political organisation, the P.C.I., which has a cultural organisation called ARCHI which usually has an office in every town of any size which puts on films, concerts, and also hunting, billiards, and anything which could be put under culture in the broadest sense. ARCHI is run independently of each other but they must be autonomous financially from each other. Then independently from that the Communist Party runs Festivals of L'Unataire which are a big thing in cultural terms—they're usually pretty genuine popular festivals which involve a lot of people."

Apart from these, various sections of the media, television and radio particularly, have emerged as alternatives to the existing systems.

Of course, as Nick points out the emergence of such alternatives were not only started off essentially to subsidise the PCI but rely on different environmental factors, and also primarily on a powerful progressive party; which even

the most naive would not suggest exists in Britain.

Thus how viable is MFS, even in its initial days as a cohesive, practicable alternative—to the mainstream shackling controls of the business—"Well it can grow from small seeds. From small seeds mighty oaks do grow, and all that. We take it as it comes and there are quite a few small record labels, especially in modern jazz, folk music and it may be possible to combine them if the conditions are right."

The control of rock business defeats itself—it seems to me why Punk happened was the business' fault. The business was no longer satisfying the public, it was just turning out very mechanically manufactured schmaltz which eventually grew quite distasteful to poor, hard, repressed, working-class kids or whatever they were. So there was a movement at the grass roots which produced a fairly vibrant, violent music which quickly got transformed into plastic copy. And also they weren't able, didn't want to, or didn't think of it—to form themselves into independents. Quite a few of them started out with alternative record companies, out of necessity and because the big record companies weren't interested in them. However the bigger punk groups all signed up, didn't use their strength as a weapon against the industry."

"It's a contradiction because a lot of them started with a genuine distaste, distrust for what the music industry stood for and the music it had. You justify bigger sales, going signing record contracts by the pretext of reaching a larger audience but in the end you kill yourself—you can't do it—the industry transforms everything you do into a commodity . . . an image of what you're doing."

Punks probably don't see it in a similar light. Their response would probably be most accurately articulated by a few lines which John Walters (John Peel's radio producer) wrote in a recent issue of ZigZag:

"Their war with the Bourgeoisie is economic—ours is cultural. The Bourgeoisie for us is the people who don't want to change . . . Our battle with the Bourgeoisie is not about NATO or the education system. The normals want history to stop now and the world to freeze into a kind of Dr Finlay's Casebook where everything is in its place."

ROCK IN OPPOSITION



"If you could separate the two out at least it'd be a logical statement, but you can't separate the two out so it's an illogical statement. Our culture is a product of what is economical, what the record industry regards as economical—or profitable, to be more accurate—becomes the culture—becomes what sells newspapers. A certain line will sell more newspapers . . .

"It's economics that dominates everything, dominates and rules, and oversees all culture in this country. There are obvious exceptions like the Arts Council. In a certain sense its function is to redress the balance, but only in the interests of the middle classes, the educated classes—who can't stand the stuff that churns out of the radio so that they might invest some of their ill-gotten gains in sophisticated culture, but they don't do anything about Radio One, it goes on blaring its mind out to the poor old masses who sit in the factory listening to all this crap, and being generally stupefied."

MFS, though, by initiating the as yet smaller organisations Musicnet and Rock In Opposition (. . . "just me and a telephone") may provide the impetus for a real alternative network in this country.

He hopes MUSICNET will, in the near future have an administrator who'll devote his time to travelling the country, and contacting those who are interested in setting up a non-commercial alternative distribution.

RIO, again is a small idea, conceived around a nucleus of 'European' 'progressive' groups including Henry Cow. These groups in their conception of 'political' are very different to the more populist understanding of a political band, such as The Tom Robinson Band. To Nick though TRB are a pop group (here a derisive term) ". . . because his songs stink of sentimentality—or at least some of them do. I think his songs are insults in many ways."

But the effect is surely positive?

"Well he's having the effect of a liberal social worker, he's sort of like a priest, he makes everybody feel like they're part of a wonderful happy community."

Do you think then music should be vehicle or instrument of a particular pre-defined politics?

"I would disagree with you quite strongly or else I wouldn't work for Henry Cow. Henry Cow's politics are quite primitive. The groups in RIO, Univers Zero consider themselves liberationists. They organise themselves politically and they probably vote left, but they haven't got any great understanding of political theory. The only

ones who have are Stormy Six, and some members of Henry Cow. Etron Fou, they're like dadaist and very political in the way they organise themselves. Independent of the industry. No compromise whatsoever, and the music, no compromise.

There again later Nick points out the obvious importance of TRB . . . the fact that 'Glad To Be Gay', "begins to sell a lot, get played on the radio, god knows what, is going to make it more normal to be gay. It's all part of the general trend that Gay Liberation is a real thing so it affects people's lives—I think that definitely has a real effect. And I think that if you sing very clearly about anti-racism then it may have some quite positive effect."

With this in mind Nick enthuses over the positivism and energy coming from RAR, although at the same time being more reserved about the way they flirt with the rock business.

"They justify it to themselves by saying they're influencing the bands. It's good getting the bands in under the banner of racism—it starts to politicise the bands—I'm not sure, it's maybe the case that bands put themselves in RAR concerts simply because they know what would draw people to the concert and that they would organise concerts and that would be instrumental to fame and fortune—it'd be prostituted and perverted. . . The equivalent of that happens in Italy with pseudo political groups and musicians and political parties. The logical thing next would be music against capitalism, and that tendency. How they'll do that without physically involving music against capitalism. People don't see capitalism as a real thing, whereas racism you can see . . . it isn't in normal vocabulary."

And what about the Progressive Cultural Organisation (perhaps the political mirror of RAR) which received some publicity after arguing along rather staid party lines that Punk rock is an instrument of Fascism.

"I don't know anything about them, except I've met Cornelius Cardew and that mob a few times. They're deep and sincere people, but at the same time I disagree totally with their approach to everything. Their approach seems to be very limited and irrelevant to what people are actually doing—and hopeless musically—they play music which was forgotten fifty years ago, and they don't play it very well, and they try and make it as accessible and simple and it's an insult to people. The lyrics themselves are low poetry slogan type things."

Are you interested in a socialist music, or something which represents it—do you think it can exist?

"I'm sure socialist music is possible, but it's a fairly irrelevant term. A dangerous term as well, because if there is a socialist music, then obviously everything else which is not socialist music is

in some way inferior to it—which I'm not interested in at all. Different people have different views as to the meaning and importance of socialism in the British context. I think that the word socialism is a barrier in many ways. But it's very important to organise alternatives, and very important to play serious, tense, provocative, 'subversive' music . . ."

It's likely that MFS and its various beneficiaries will be mostly ignored by the music press because it has little potential of good copy. At times there will be small but enthusiastic write-ups, and at others derisive references probably to the tune of "bearded intellectuals".

"Socialism" in this country is a difficult banner to run under, but MFS hopefully will continue—despite the difficulties and restraints of being such a small active nucleus, and the disillusionment of some, both by the lack of public response, and just overcoming the work involved in the running of the organisation.

But if it can remain a platform—or a group of people throwing ideas around (the group's diversity ensures the ideas being different) which evolve or occur into projects, provocative projects and music—such as the Battersea conference, the very successful 'Summer in the City', or the 'Words and Music' week—each stimulating in their own way, then hopefully this can open the path to constructing a strong and very real alternative to the existing music business structure.

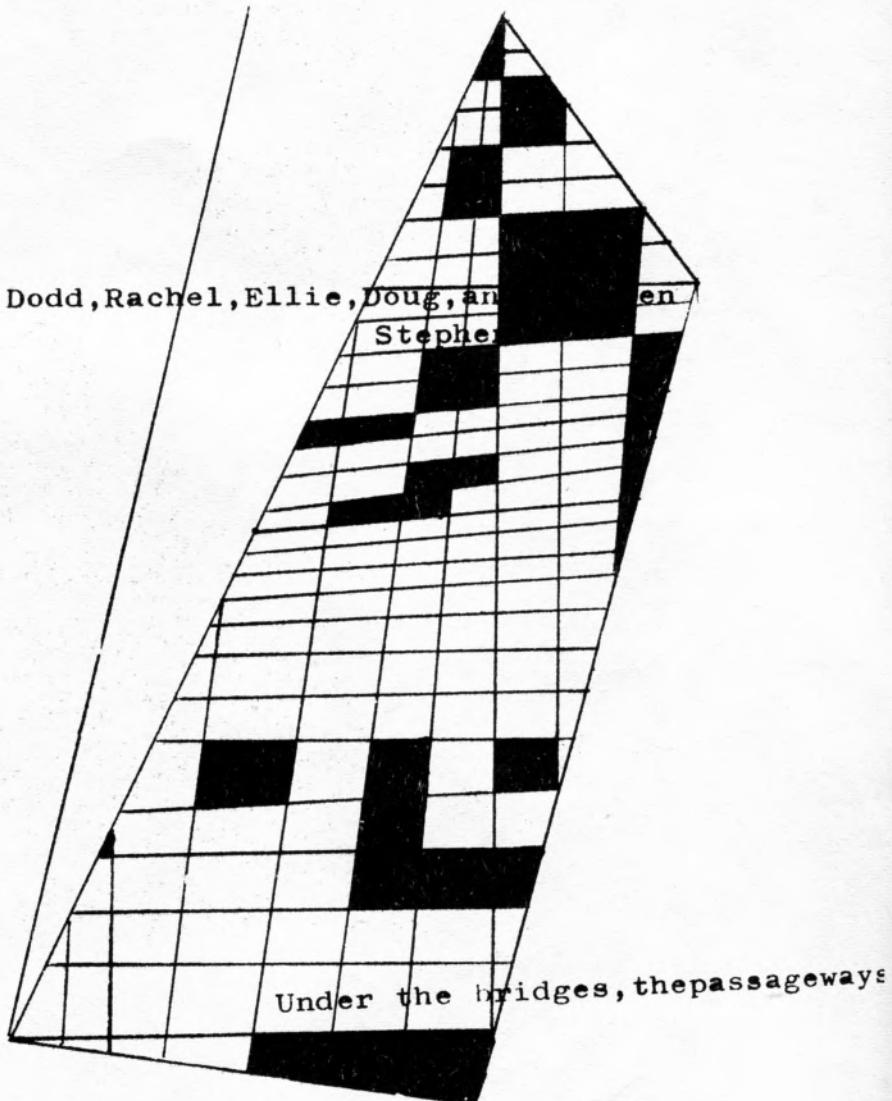
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There may be a second issue